

Testimony of Nia Holston, Black Student Alliance, Yale College

SB No. 774, An Act Concerning the Dissemination of Information Concerning Voting Rights to Persons Being Released From Department of Correction Facilities

March 11th, 2013

My name is Nia Holston, and I am a junior at Yale University. I am the Political Action Chair for the Black Student Alliance at Yale, and the Ward 1 Democratic Co-Chair for the city of New Haven. I express my full support for S.B. No. 774, an act concerning the dissemination of information concerning voting rights to persons being released from CT Department of Correction Facilities.

In my work with the New Haven Reentry Initiative's *Unlock the Vote* campaign, we noticed a disturbing trend. The majority of former offenders we spoke to had absolutely no idea that their voting rights were restored after incarceration, pending that they were no longer on parole. Most of them were fed incorrect information about their voting rights, and were completely disillusioned with the electoral system. Some men and women we met had never voted in their lifetime.

I believe that by disenfranchising potential voters, we do a disservice to our communities. How do we expect returning citizens to become productive members of society, if they cannot participate in the most basic duty of citizenship? Contrary to popular belief, the majority of these men and women would like to vote, if they were aware of their rights. Of those men and women that registered to vote through our *Unlock the Vote* campaign, over fifty-four percent voted in the 2012 elections. We need to ensure that correctional facilities are giving returning citizens the correct information. I urge the committee to pass this legislation, with swift action.

Written